CONFERENCE ON DISARMAMENT

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ENGLISH

FINAL RECORD OF THE SEVEN HUNDRED AND NINETY-FIRST PLENARY MEETING

**Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Thursday, 26 March 1998, at 11 a.m.**

President: Mr. Al-Hussami (Syrian Arab Republic)

The PRESIDENT (translated from Arabic): I declare open the 791st plenary meeting of the Conference on Disarmament.

I should like at the outset to extend on behalf of all of us a warm welcome to Her Excellency Ambassador Carmen Moreno, Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs of Mexico, who will be addressing the Conference. I welcome her and I give her the floor.

Mrs. MORENO (Mexico) (translated from Spanish): Mr. President, allow me to begin by extending to you the congratulations of the Mexican delegation on taking the Chair of the Conference on Disarmament. I should also like to express appreciation for the efforts of your two predecessors, the Ambassadors of Sweden and Switzerland, who conducted arduous and intensive consultations to provide the Conference with an agenda and a programme of work.

It is my understanding that a decision is close to rationalize and organize consultations on agenda items, but that the decision does not prejudge priorities or substance. We are pleased to see progress towards consensus, which will still have to await the outcome of work which, if we succeed in initiating it, will still be exploratory. The difficulties encountered in beginning actual negotiations reveal a lack of agreement on a broad disarmament agenda in the post-cold-war era. Therefore, I have come to Geneva to share with you Mexico's thinking concerning the situation that has prevailed in the Conference since 1997, in which it has not been able to justify its existence as the sole multilateral forum for disarmament negotiations. A variety of substantive and procedural reasons combine to hinder a consensus on priorities and on pressing and significant issues, as if international security today were not under threat or not at risk, and as if no political will were needed to reduce risks and prevent catastrophes.

The lack of an agenda in keeping with the times and prevailing circumstances would seem to reflect something deeper, perhaps something more serious than a cyclical crisis. It reflects the uncertainties of a world which has not yet drawn the lines which will replace those that disappeared with the end of the bipolar order. In the midst of these uncertainties the illusion has arisen that nuclear disarmament is no longer so important or pressing, and is the concern of only the small group of nuclear-weapon States. This is a dangerous illusion, because nuclear disarmament is more important today than yesterday, more pressing than ever and in the interests of all States, particularly those of us which do not posses such weapons. After all, in the era of East-West confrontation the certainty of mutual assured destruction lent some weight to the argument that a nuclear war could not be won and would never be fought. In this way the cold war ultimately provided an uncertain degree of reassurance that, barring an accident or an error, nuclear weapons would not be used and there would be no outbreak of a third world war.

The existence of nuclear weapons and the nuclear arms race found dubious justification in the bipolar stand-off, and as long as that lasted, the international community had to resign itself to postponing indefinitely its initial objective of abolishing nuclear weapons. Measures were taken that

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were significant at the time, especially with a view to reducing international tension, but they were partial and fell well short of the need to eliminate the risk of total annihilation. Gradually, step by step, success was achieved in banning other weapons of mass destruction, such as chemical and bacteriological weapons, and in the nuclear area we made progress with regard to non-proliferation, with special emphasis on horizontal proliferation, through the 1968 Treaty and the spread of nuclear-weapon-free zones. Once the bipolar stand-off was over, logic and practice dictated that an end should also be put to the apocalyptic weapons which had mushroomed in its shadow, together with the doctrines of nuclear deterrence that had lost their basic underpinning: a designated enemy and credibility. However, although some nuclear-weapon systems have been reduced, there is no clear commitment to their abolition, and we are told that they will be needed for an indefinite period. Why? Against whom?

New doctrines of deterrence reaffirm a readiness to use nuclear weapons, including in a first strike, and this readiness has been adopted by Powers which previously rejected it. What is even more serious is that these doctrines assert a readiness to use nuclear weapons not only against other nuclear-weapon States but urbi et orbi, against anyone, and in order to prevent real or ostensible threats posed by weapons, including non-nuclear weapons, invoking an alleged right of preventive self-defence that is not recognized by international law, and ignoring the fact that even self-defence and reprisals must be governed by the principles of necessity and proportionality. If we add to the foregoing what we know about miniaturization and the fact that it is apparently possible to carry out tactical or surgical nuclear strikes without running the risk of setting off an escalation that would result in general and total mutual destruction, and even without the risk of nuclear reprisals, we can only conclude that today the probability that these catastrophic weapons will be used intentionally is greater than before. Meanwhile, the dangers associated with the use of nuclear weapons by accident or by mistake have not diminished. To make matters worse, there is also an increased risk of a loss of control of the technology and materials used in the manufacture of nuclear weapons, raising the spectre of their possible acquisition by irregular armed groups and even by terrorists.

And at the same time, conventional high-technology weapons are gaining in destructive power and precision, but also in cost, and are within the reach of an ever smaller number of States, in contrast to the situation with nuclear technology. New imbalances in conventional military capabilities cannot but lead to greater international insecurity and instability, and increase pressures on the nuclear weapon non-proliferation regime, which relies on systematic and effective efforts in the direction of nuclear disarmament. In short, new doctrines of deterrence that increase the probability of the use of these weapons, continuing risks of accidents or errors, growing insecurity surrounding technologies and materials and strains on the nuclear non-proliferation regime could, in the continued absence of consensus on nuclear disarmament, result in nuclear weapons being commonplace.

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It is often asserted that today's detente has created favourable conditions for moving forward towards a nuclear-weapon-free world, the only world offering possibilities of survival. But setting out on that road calls for a new approach which recognizes that in changed circumstances, the status quo represented by the indefinite prolongation of the monopoly of possession of apocalyptic weapons is no longer possible. Neither the previous doctrines of deterrence nor the very existence of nuclear weapons, nor efforts restricted to partial or peripheral measures, can now be justified or meet the challenges of our times. Aware of these facts, international public opinion is encouraging us to break out of the lethargy in which we seem to have been embroiled because of the illusion that the risk of a nuclear holocaust has become more remote. In December 1996, we pointed out that 60 generals and admirals advocated the total elimination of nuclear weapons. In February this year, civilian leaders of 44 nations, including former heads of State or government of nuclear-weapon States, followed suit. More significantly yet, the International Court of Justice, in a historic advisory opinion, stated unequivocally that "the obligation to pursue and bring to a conclusion negotiations leading to nuclear disarmament in all its aspects" is not dependent on the attainment of general and complete disarmament, and that this obligation is incumbent on all States, whose cooperation is needed for the realistic quest for nuclear disarmament.

It is time for all the parameters of a convention on nuclear weapons to be examined. We are convinced that together we can identify the stages which will lead, in the time-frames to be agreed on, to cessation of the production of all types of nuclear weapons and the gradual and balanced reduction of stockpiles of nuclear weapons and their delivery systems, with a view to their total and final elimination. This would not involve the imposition of deadlines, which in any case are artificial. Obviously, it will be necessary to provide for the possibility of agreeing on flexible and differentiated time-frames which take into account the quantitative and qualitative disparities in existing stockpiles.

You know very well, Mr. President, that Mexico is a peace-loving country that pursues a foreign policy which, like that of all countries, is designed to promote its interest, and first and foremost to address its security concerns. Furthermore, our external posture rests on permanent postulates enshrined in our Constitution which constitute both a binding standard of behaviour and a programme of action. One of the most salient of these postulates is the peaceful settlement of disputes, a positive expression of the rejection of the use or threat of use of force. During the long night of the cold war we took a number of initiatives designed to reduce international tension and the threat of widespread nuclear war, including initiation of the establishment of nuclear-weapon-free zones as a step towards a world completely free of nuclear weapons. We have also played an active and constructive part in all negotiations conducted in this forum since its establishment in 1962. We are aware of the new threats relating to nuclear weapons hanging over all our countries, and also the new opportunities offered by the end of the cold war. We had the honour to coordinate the efforts which led the Group of 21 in 1996 to present to this Conference a programme of

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action for the total elimination of nuclear weapons, and in 1997 to submit a draft mandate for the establishment of an ad hoc committee to begin negotiations on nuclear disarmament.

The abolition of nuclear weapons is an idea whose time has come. This forum cannot expect at one and the same time to disregard the issue and maintain its role as the only forum for multilateral negotiations on disarmament. The Conference will only succeed in breaking out of its endless consultations and begin substantive work - in other words, the negotiation of specific texts or treaties - when it acknowledges that the priority in disarmament is nuclear disarmament, and addresses the issue systematically and responsibly. There has been no lack of constructive suggestions this year which deserve careful consideration in this forum.

Mexico is convinced of the priority given by the international community to constructing firm barriers against the proliferation and use of biological weapons. This priority was acknowledged by all the States parties through the commitment to conclude the drafting of a protocol before the fifth Review Conference under the Convention. The Ad Hoc Group entrusted with the task of drafting a protocol on verification, which my delegation supports, should fully incorporate in its work the unavoidable link between proliferation of biological weapons and activities relating to biotechnological development for peaceful purposes, so as to produce an instrument which builds trust among the parties and achieves universality. We should welcome the entry into force of the Chemical Weapons Convention, the constant increase in the number of parties to it and the initiation of work by the Organization set up to supervise the implementation of its provisions. The issue of the promotion of international cooperation for the peaceful uses of dual-use technology and materials is a necessary reference for the respect of all the obligations entered into under the Convention.

Non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction merits a broad approach taking into account the horizontal, vertical and qualitative aspects of the issue, as well as all matters relating to transfers for peaceful purposes of technology, information, equipment and materials linked to the manufacture of such weapons, including the establishment of the requisite machinery to monitor possible dual uses of all these elements. The problem to which I refer goes beyond the purview of existing treaties, which so far have covered only one category of weapon at a time, despite efforts made to strengthen them through the adoption of new verification provisions. The various export control regimes have also displayed shortcomings which heighten concern about the proliferation of materials and technology for military uses. The closed and intrinsically discriminatory nature of these regimes helps to diminish their effectiveness. Mexico has argued that these types of arrangement should be negotiated multilaterally. We suggest that an exercise should be undertaken to identify the elements that should be included in a multilateral regime to monitor transfers of dual-use technology and materials relating to the manufacture of weapons of mass destruction. This is a task that falls to the Conference on Disarmament.

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In 1967, we agreed on the principles which must govern the activities of States in the exploration and use of outer space, which must be pursued exclusively for peaceful purposes. The Treaty bans the placing of nuclear weapons and any type of weapon of mass destruction in orbit around the Earth. I consider that it would be rash to affirm that an arms race is currently taking place in outer space, but it is a fact that we do not have a ban on the deployment in outer space of weapons other than weapons of mass destruction. It is also a fact that an increasing number of countries have acquired a capability to place objects in space. The military applications of the use of outer space do not necessarily constitute a violation of the prevailing regime, but technological developments over the last 20 years should be scrutinized in order to prevent the outbreak of militarization of space in breach of the purpose and object of the 1967 Treaty and the interests of humanity. In Mexico's view General Assembly resolution 52/37 provides a basis for generating the necessary consensus that would allow for the prompt re-establishment of the Ad Hoc Committee which previously existed in the Conference on Disarmament and had begun much-needed work.

Mexico's interests are not confined to the abolition of nuclear weapons. International security is also in jeopardy because of the excess conventional arms build-up and the increasingly destructive capabilities of high-technology weapons. We simply believe that conventional disarmament has better prospects of success at the regional level. That is why our initiatives in this matter have been pursued in our own geographical area. In 1997 I had the privilege of presiding over and finalizing, with a speed reflecting the importance attached to the matter by all the countries in the hemisphere, the work carried out in the Organization of American States on the Inter-American Convention against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms, Ammunition, Explosives, and Other Related Materials. In January this year, experts from the countries of the Rio Group met in Mexico City to study possible measures of self-regulation in the acquisition of offensive conventional weapons.

The development of humanitarian international law made incontestable gains in 1997. The adoption and opening for signature of the Ottawa Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on Their Destruction is a cause for great satisfaction to the Mexican Government. In a negotiating process open to all countries, the objective we had set ourselves was attained in less than a year. Of course, that result was not achieved by starting from scratch. We succeeded in establishing a total ban on mines at the end of a process that lasted over 20 years in which humanitarian imperatives and military needs were duly taken into account in successive stages. Mexico was in the forefront of this process, as well as in the regional efforts in which I had the privilege of negotiating and submitting, with Canada and St. Lucia, the resolution of the Organization of American States establishing the objective of a hemisphere free from anti-personnel mines. Also in the region, we decided to make special efforts to ensure that Central America is free of anti-personnel mines before the year 2000, and we have secured resources for that purpose.

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Mexico is not content merely to have contributed to setting the standard. We must now do everything necessary to promote the entry into force of the Ottawa Convention and its universal implementation. We do not exclude any forum in pursuing these efforts, which must take into account what has already been achieved by a Convention which now can boast over 120 signatory States. In Mexico this Convention is being analysed with a view to ratification as soon as possible. We believe that the 1980 Convention on certain Conventional Weapons is the natural context for agreeing on phased measures that would take us one step further with respect to what was achieved in Protocol II, amended in 1996, without eroding the prohibitions agreed upon in Oslo. Mexico deems it urgent to make a start as soon as possible on preparatory work for the second conference to review the 1980 Convention, which in any event must take place at the latest in the year 2001.

Our Conference has the necessary experience and expertise to shoulder its responsibilities, establish an agenda and programme of work in keeping with the security concerns of the times and the interests of the international community as a whole. It is nevertheless true that its methods of work are no longer appropriate to the new realities. The change in the membership of the Conference resulting from successive increases in the number of members should lead us to review our procedures. The division of member States into groups as currently constituted, which is a carry-over from the cold war, is to say the least anachronistic and does not make decision-making any easier. The time when the Group of 21 acted as a bridge between the Atlantic Alliance and the defunct Warsaw Pact is no more. The real division with regard to security today is between the nuclear-weapon States on the one hand and the non-nuclear-weapon States on the other. In such circumstances, we must ask ourselves once again whether the rule of consensus, a mere euphemism for veto power, can remain unchanged if there is a genuine desire to avoid a permanent stalemate in the Conference. Mexico is convinced that, when dealing with issues in which the security interests of each and every State are at stake, the rule of consensus guarantees that everyone's interests will be safeguarded in the context of specific substantive negotiations. But the rule of consensus cannot be applied in such a way as to prevent the establishment of subsidiary bodies or the institutional machinery needed for the effective discharge of the Conference's functions. Carried to an extreme, as is happening now, consensus is reduced to the adoption of decisions that express the lowest common denominator, or, if you prefer, the line of least resistance. In 1982, the Group of 21 proposed an addition to the rules of procedure along the lines I have just mentioned. In the observations it made at the time on the proposal (CD/330), the Group of 21 indicated that the paralysis of an important section of the negotiating function of the then Committee on Disarmament was contrary to the spirit of the rule of consensus. My delegation believes that this idea should be explored afresh. This is without a doubt the most important of the issues usually grouped under the title "Improved and effective functioning of the Conference", although others such as those raised by the delegation of Chile in late 1997 should also be considered. I refer in particular to the idea that the subsidiary bodies which the Conference decides to set up should be of a permanent nature,

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obviating the need to re-establish them each year, unless the Conference itself decide otherwise. This, I believe, would be highly useful for our work.

These first 10 weeks have served to encourage a process of reflection on current disarmament priorities which began when we were still negotiating the Comprehensive Nuclear Test-Ban Treaty. Judging from the present situation, it would seem we have been unable to reach agreement on how we can contribute to the safer, more equitable and more humane world on which the participants in the Security Council summit set their sights in early 1992. Certainly, the prospect that nuclear weapons will continue to exist "for an indefinite period" diminishes the security of all States, the security of the international community and the security of humanity itself. As my delegation announced in the debate in the First Committee of the General Assembly on 13 October 1997, if this paralysis persists, those of us who are committed to the goal of nuclear disarmament will find a way to overcome it.

The PRESIDENT (translated from Arabic): I thank Her Excellency Ambassador Carmen Moreno, Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs of Mexico, for her important statement and for the kind words that she addressed to the Chair. I have on my list of speakers His Excellency Ambassador Grey, Ambassador of the United States of America to the Conference on Disarmament, and I give him the floor.

Mr. GREY (United States of America): Mr. President, please allow me to congratulate you on your assumption of the presidency at this critical juncture. You can rest assured that you will have the full cooperation of my delegation as you strive to guide the Conference into substantive work.

I would like to focus on two issues on the agenda of the Conference which are of critical importance to the United States, and to the international community: the fissile material cut-off treaty (FMCT) and anti-personnel landmines (APL). Initiating substantive work on these two subjects - one nuclear and the other conventional, and both ripe for negotiation - would once again demonstrate to the world community that the Conference on Disarmament is a serious negotiating forum in which meaningful disarmament agreements can be reached.

Three years ago this month the Conference agreed to establish an ad hoc committee with a mandate to negotiate a treaty that would prohibit the production of fissile material for use in nuclear weapons. This was a key step toward substantive work. Unfortunately, since then we have been unable to re-establish this consensus to get negotiations started. These three years of delay are hardly a legacy that the CD can be proud of.

We now have before us a proposal by Austria (CD/1492, dated 3 February 1998) that, if adopted, would enable the Conference to begin negotiations on a fissile material cut-off treaty. The United States strongly supports the Austrian proposal, and I urge all my colleagues to do the same.

(Mr. Grey, United States)

In recent years the international community has made substantial progress in seeking to address nuclear dangers. The Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) was extended indefinitely, and the Comprehensive Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) was signed and is now being ratified. Nuclear-weapon-free-zones are increasing, not the level of nuclear weapons. These treaties now provide assurances against the use, or threat of use, of nuclear weapons to nearly 100 non-nuclear-weapon States. The United States and Russia agreed last March in Helsinki that once START II is ratified, they will negotiate still deeper reductions under START III, as well as measures to promote their irreversibility. Once these reductions are in place, the nuclear weapons of the United States and Russia will be reduced by about 80 per cent from peak cold war levels.

A year and a half have passed since the CD completed work on the Comprehensive Nuclear Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT), the most recent multilateral treaty associated with the long-term process of nuclear disarmament. The international community is still waiting for this forum to take the next step, to begin negotiations on a ban on the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons or other explosive devices, consistent with the decision taken in 1995 to establish an FMCT ad hoc committee.

It would be incorrect to allege that a fissile material cut-off treaty is "only" a non-proliferation measure. To be sure, it will have important non-proliferation benefits. But by its very nature, a cut-off treaty will also have important benefits which relate to the process of nuclear disarmament. This is important, so I will elaborate and put these benefits in context.

The United States agrees with many other countries that cut-off is one of the cornerstones in building a solid foundation for global nuclear disarmament. In broad terms, the United States seeks a world in which the role of nuclear weapons is further diminished, bringing us closer to our ultimate goal of complete elimination. A number of separate, but mutually reinforcing, bilateral and multilateral steps play a key role in the long-term process of nuclear disarmament. These steps include: freezing the development of advanced new types of nuclear weapons; reducing the number of delivery vehicles and warheads; limiting the amount of fissile material available for use in nuclear weapons; and ensuring that excess fissile material is never returned to nuclear weapons programmes.

These steps are being vigorously pursued through the START process, the CTBT, and various other bilateral, multilateral, and unilateral initiatives. For example, the United States has removed more than 225 metric tons of fissile material from its nuclear stockpile and has voluntarily pledged to place this excess fissile material under IAEA safeguards as soon as possible. This process, along with many other initiatives, is well under way.

But the current mosaic of nuclear disarmament initiatives still lacks a multilateral agreement to cut the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons or other explosive devices. Such a treaty would apply equally to all

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parties, thereby extending to the nuclear-weapon States some constraints that non-nuclear-weapons States have already accepted. In sum, a cut-off treaty would have clear benefits from a nuclear disarmament perspective:

It would cap the amount of fissile material available for nuclear weapons globally. Just as the CTBT places a qualitative limit on States' abilities to develop new weapon systems, an FMCT would put a quantitative constraint on the amount of fissile material available for nuclear explosives.

It would extend verification measures to fissile material production facilities that are not currently subject to international monitoring. This would include, for the first time, all reprocessing and enrichment facilities that are not yet subject to verification, including those in the United States.

It would bind legally and subject to international verification those countries that have recently halted fissile material production, including the United States. It is important to point out, as Australia's Minister for Foreign Affairs stated here in early February, that the current consensus among the nuclear-weapon States in favour of negotiating a cut-off treaty reflects their policies under current circumstances; we cannot assume this collective resolve will has forever. We have an opportunity to "lock that consensus in" through an indefinite, legally binding treaty. We should not let this opportunity pass.

The FMCT would help foster the creation of a climate conducive to continued, long-term progress of reducing nuclear-weapon stockpiles. Looking at post-START III negotiations, perhaps involving all the nuclear-weapon States, it is difficult to imagine how nuclear arms reductions could go much deeper, unless there is a dependable limit on fissile material for weapons, as well as confidence that the international community could detect clandestine production.

And the FMCT would meet an important nuclear disarmament commitment made by the NPT parties at the 1995 NPT Review and Extension Conference: to seek the "immediate commencement and early conclusion" of cut-off negotiations. The United States stands ready to meet its commitment to negotiate a fissile material cut-off treaty as an important part of our effort to continue fulfilling the obligations outlined in NPT article VI.

A cut-off treaty would also have significant non-proliferation benefits. In addition to extending safeguards to facilities not currently covered, it would promote stability in regions where the risks of escalating arms races are greatest. We hear talk of dangerous regional "imbalances" which must be addressed. Would it not make sense to take an important step, a step we can take now, to ensure that those imbalances do not grow larger?

There is a strong sentiment in this body to advance the nuclear disarmament process. We have heard, and take note of, the concerns raised by other delegations. I have stated that the United States is prepared to listen, to participate, to contribute, and to discuss issues of concern to all

(Mr. Grey, United States)

members of this body. I have also said that the United States is prepared to work with every member of this body in an effort to find a way forward. But as we continue our general discussion, we also must act. We must do what is realistically achievable, that is, to negotiate a fissile material cut-off treaty on the basis of the agreed 1995 mandate. We must not shirk this responsibility.

I would now like to turn briefly to the challenge of negotiating further restrictions on anti-personnel landmines, another important responsibility of the Conference on Disarmament. A number of the largest producers and stockpilers of APL have not adhered to existing agreements, citing national security concerns and other significant factors. Given these realities, an export/transfer ban negotiated in the CD would enable many more States to accept international obligations that restrict APL. The right question to ask is not whether this or that agreement is better than another, but whether we, in this forum, can act in a tangible way that will further diminish the damage and loss of life that APL cause. It is very clear that we can.

The United States hoped that by this stage of our work this year, the Conference would already have reached agreement to establish an ad hoc committee to conduct negotiations on this important subject. But appointment of a special coordinator would be a significant first step, and we look forward to working with a special coordinator as he seeks to formulate a mandate that members of the Conference can accept and support. We must not delay further. The international community is looking to the CD for action!

Mr. SINCLAIR (Canada): I have asked for the floor today to make a very short statement. In our plenary statements of 22 January, 26 February and 19 March, we outlined Canada's substantive priorities for the Conference for 1998. In those statements, we also shared our views as to how the Conference should consider moving forward on the various issues before us which have been identified by delegations as priorities.

The draft decision to be put before us does not respond to Canadian priorities in a meaningful way. We recognize that agenda item 1 is a difficult area. Priority areas usually are. We have identified nuclear disarmament and FMCT as national priorities, although we recognize that moving these issues forward will require careful and deliberate thinking. We have also proposed work on conventional disarmament and on the non-weaponization of outer space. We have been prepared to move ahead on each issue as and when possible.

Since January, we have made it clear in this Conference that we question whether any real progress can be made on negative security assurances at this point. We have posed a basic question and, subsequently, we have expanded on it. We have repeatedly suggested that a special coordinator should be appointed to examine these questions, and those which other delegations may have, before taking the deliberate decision to establish an ad hoc committee.

No one has engaged the debate on this issue - at least not with us. Our suggestions have been ignored. The only conclusion we can draw from this

(Mr. Sinclair, Canada)

silence is that the rest of the Conference does not share our concerns, that the rest of the Conference feels that such questions do not need to be explored, even in the most preliminary way, before taking the deliberate decision to establish an ad hoc committee with the mandate as indicated in the draft decision. Thus, we remain sceptical about whether this Committee will be able to make real progress on this issue.

However, Canada does not approach the work of this Conference with a veto mentality. For the record, and to be perfectly clear, we will not block work proceeding on the basis of your draft decision when you put it to us formally, Mr. President, if it is the desire of the rest of the Conference to proceed on this basis.

The PRESIDENT (translated from Arabic): I thank the representative of Canada for his statement. This concludes my list of speakers for this morning. Does any other delegation wish to take the floor? It seems that no one wishes to take the floor.

The intensive efforts exerted by all delegations during the past few weeks in order to enable the Conference to start its substantive work have enabled us to reach today a consensus on a programme of work, or at least an incipient programme of work, and therefore, in order to maintain this momentum I should like to formalize the consensus which has emerged from our informal plenary meetings and our consultations by recording it in the official records of the Conference. Before submitting the draft decision on the programme of work for your consideration, I should like to read out in English a declaration which will be issued as an official document of the Conference.

I see that His Excellency the Ambassador of Pakistan has asked for the floor. You have the floor, Sir.

Mr. AKRAM (Pakistan): Mr. President, may I suggest that before you proceed there is one small matter, or perhaps it is a misunderstanding, that we adjourn the formal meeting, clarify that we do have a consensus in an informal meeting and then go into plenary before you read your statement? I would strongly suggest that course of action in case we run into difficulties.

Mr. GOOSEN (South Africa): My delegation supports the proposal just put forward by the delegation of Pakistan, the distinguished Ambassador.

The PRESIDENT (translated from Arabic): If there are no objections and if it be the wish of the Conference that we suspend the formal meeting in order to carry out informal consultations, I am ready. His Excellency the Ambassador of Egypt.

Mr. ZAHRAN (Egypt) (translated from Arabic): While I support the proposal that we have heard from His Excellency the Ambassador of Pakistan and the representative of South Africa to transform the formal meeting into an informal meeting, I believe that there might be a misunderstanding concerning paragraph 2 of the draft decision, or perhaps there is a typographical error at the end of the second paragraph of the draft decision in English. It says,

(Mr. Zahran, Egypt)

"These arrangements could take the form of international legally binding instruments". I believe that in this respect there is a plural too many, that is to say -

(continued in English)

it is not our agreement in the Group of 21. It is singular and not plural. According to the decision on "Principles and objectives for nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament" adopted at the 1995 NPT Review and Extension Conference, it is a singular instrument. It is a multilateral legally binding instrument. So maybe there is a typographical error - an "s" was added unintentionally - and I hope this can be clarified. If not, we can then turn this meeting into an informal meeting.

The PRESIDENT (translated from Arabic): I thank His Excellency the Ambassador of the Arab Republic of Egypt for the clarifications that he has provided. I give the floor to His Excellency the Ambassador of Viet Nam.

Mr. NGUYEN QUY BINH (Viet Nam): As I am speaking in plenary for the first time, allow me briefly to congratulate you, Mr. President, and to assure you of our full cooperation. I would also like to compliment the efforts of the previous Presidents. With regard to the point raised, it was a mistake. When discussing with the others, the wording of the NPT was mentioned, and at that moment I did not have the paper at hand, so an "s" was unintentionally added. That is, the substance we were discussing was the word "could" and "should", rather than the "s". This is just a small point, and that is the explanation.

The PRESIDENT (translated from Arabic): I thank His Excellency the Ambassador of Viet Nam. When the President submitted the document to the Conference, he had the definite impression that there was a consensus among the members of the Conference on the text that was circulated and therefore, and if His Excellency the Ambassador of Pakistan wanted to ascertain the content and the implications of paragraph 2, I would like to make it clear that we agreed to take the wording from the text of the decision on "Principles and objectives" adopted at the NPT Review and Extension Conference, which says: "These steps could take the form of an internationally legally binding instrument" - without an "s", in the singular - and therefore the correction that His Excellency the Ambassador of the Arab Republic of Egypt proposed is valid. There was a typographical error in the text, which we could rectify by saying: "These arrangements could take the form of an international legally binding instrument". Your Excellency the Ambassador of Morocco, you have the floor.

Mr. BENJELLOUN-TOUIMI (Morocco): On a point of order, I think there is a request to suspend this plenary. I believe that we do not need to go into this discussion here. We could hold it in an informal setting, where I am sure that any difficulty or misunderstanding would be clarified.

The PRESIDENT (translated from Arabic): I thank the distinguished Ambassador of Morocco. The President is willing to suspend the meeting. I declare this plenary meeting suspended for half an hour so that informal consultations can be carried out. We shall remain seated.

The meeting was suspended at 11.50 a.m. and resumed at 12.25 p.m.

The PRESIDENT (translated from Arabic): The intensive efforts exerted by all delegations during the past few weeks in order to enable the Conference to start its substantive work have enabled us to reach today a consensus on our programme of work, and therefore I should like to formalize the consensus which has emerged from our informal plenary meetings by recording it in the verbatim records. Before submitting the draft decision on the programme of work for consideration by the Conference, I should like to read out in English the following declaration, which will be issued as an official document of the Conference.

(continued in English)

After having identified agenda item 1, entitled "Cessation of the nuclear arms race and nuclear disarmament", as being of an extremely high priority, and after having used all means of consultations provided for in the rules of procedure of the Conference, the President came to the conclusion that the only way to move forward on substance at this stage would consist in substantially increasing consultations regarding this item, under his authority by using all possibilities, including the assistance of the outgoing and the incoming Presidents, with a view to reaching consensus on how to deal with this item.

The presidency is thus willing to consider henceforth agenda item 1 as its first priority, to vigorously continue its efforts in this respect and to present early and regular reports on these consultations throughout the session, including before the end of the second part of the 1998 session.

Mr. GREY (United States of America): Mr. President, the latest version you gave us had a slight change in the second paragraph of the draft decision on your non-paper. I have been authorized to say that the United States, France and the United Kingdom can accept this change because, in our view, it is consistent with the 1995 NPT "Principles and objectives" document as well as consistent with our long-standing policy with respect to, and support for, regional nuclear-weapon-free-zone treaties.

The PRESIDENT (translated from Arabic): I thank the Ambassador of the United States of America. The records of the meeting will reflect his statement. I give the floor to the representative of South Africa.

Mr. GOOSEN (South Africa): Mr. President, firstly, as you read through the document, having made the Presidential declaration, it would be appreciated if the secretariat could indicate what the document number of that statement would be. And secondly, we would like to make a statement before the actual decision is taken. Is the correct time for us now to make that statement, or are you going to move on to the decision being taken at a later stage?

The PRESIDENT (translated from Arabic): We have not yet taken a decision on the draft decision. I shall read it first and then we shall submit it for a decision to be taken thereon.

On the number of the Presidential declaration, the distinguished representative of South Africa and the distinguished members are invited to note that it will be CD/1500 - this is going to be the number which will be attributed to it.

(continued in English)

If we adopt the draft decision, the number will be CD/1501.

(continued in Arabic)

Allow me now to read out to you the text of the draft decision in English. Excuse me. I see the Ambassador of Morocco. You have the floor, Sir.

Mr. BENJELLOUN-TOUIMI (Morocco): Mr. President, I was wondering whether, in order to save time, we could refer to the decision you have given us - Revision 3 dated 26 March 1998, I think. If this is the text that you are going to read, let us say that we agree to its adoption, thereby saving 15 minutes.

The PRESIDENT (translated from Arabic): I did not fully understand the request of the Ambassador of Morocco, but I thank him very much for his proposal. If there is no objection on the part of any member of the Conference, this is going to save us valuable time which we shall require at a later stage. Therefore, if there is no objection to the draft decision submitted to you in Revision 3 dated 16 March 1998, I shall consider that this draft decision has been approved and has become an official document of the Conference and will be circulated under the symbol CD/1501. His Excellency the representative of South Africa.

Mr. GOOSEN (South Africa): Mr. President, before this decision is adopted, my delegation wishes to extend its congratulations to you on your assumption of the presidency of the Conference, and will extend our full cooperation to you in the accomplishment of your tasks.

Ambassador Selebi addressed this Conference on 20 January 1998 and stated that:

> "On the issue of negative security assurances, my delegation has found it of note that the CD has in the past clearly demonstrated a singular lack of any progress on the security assurances issue. We also question whether this is an issue which truly belongs in the Conference on Disarmament. South Africa's view of security assurances is further that it is not a genuine disarmament measure and that it can, in fact, be viewed as a confirmation of the nuclear-weapon status of those States which possess these weapons.
>
> "Since the 1997 first Preparatory Committee meeting for the year 2000 NPT Review Conference, South Africa has adopted the position

(Mr. Goosen, South Africa)

that the issue of negative security assurances should be dealt with in the context of the NPT's strengthened review process as opposed to any other forum. South Africa sees security assurances as an implicit part of the NPT bargain which was struck with non-nuclear-weapon States (NNWS) when they forswore the nuclear weapons option, i.e. the right of States which have given up nuclear weapons not to have nuclear weapons used or threatened to be used against them."

In view of South Africa's position on this issue, it is therefore incumbent upon me to make it clear that with regard to decision 2 of the programme of work which the Conference is about to adopt, this element of the programme does not have the support of the South African delegation. We continue to question whether the CD is the appropriate venue for dealing with this issue; whether there is any real prospect of making progress on the matter in this forum, given the divergent and opposing views which are being papered over by this decision, and it is apparent that there is no clear and common vision about what is being sought by the supporters, either active or tacit, of this decision. South Africa further wishes to make it clear that any decision taken on the issue of negative security assurances in the Conference on Disarmament will not inhibit our delegation from pressing forward with this matter in a more appropriate venue, particularly given the fact that any decision taken here on this matter is without our support.

Mr. SIMAS MAGALHÃES (Brazil): Actually, I would like to speak perhaps after the adoption of the decision, but since you have given me the floor, Mr. President, let me gladly make use of it. First of all, I would like to thank you and your predecessors for your efforts in achieving consensus for the Conference to begin its work in 1998. Brazil will join in the adoption of the decision contained in document CD/1501. This procedural step provides the practical means for the Conference to begin to explore appropriate ways of dealing with some of its agenda items. Consultations leading up to the current version of this decision made clear that both the decision and its language fall far short of the expectations of the membership of the Conference with regard to the items contained therein. It can correctly be described as the lowest common denominator in the strictest sense of the term. It does not necessarily correspond to our positions on the items it addresses.

For its part, and as made clear in its statements to the Conference earlier this session, Brazil would have been agreeable to commencing work on all the issues in the decision. It is regrettable that a refusal by some to allow the Conference to address all issues before it, particularly nuclear disarmament, impedes us from properly following this course. The result is to a large extent a lopsided decision, but the central issue of nuclear disarmament is surprisingly not to be dealt with by an ad hoc committee or even a special coordinator. This being so, we nevertheless hope that the new formula, whereby the presidency will as its first priority intensify its consultations on nuclear disarmament, will be conducive to an understanding that there are legitimate and productive ways of dealing with this matter in the Conference. Some members of this Conference should realize the time has come for this body to assume its rightful place in addressing nuclear disarmament. The international community, as stated here this morning, "is looking to the CD for action".

The PRESIDENT (translated from Arabic): I thank the distinguished representative of Brazil. Does anyone wish to take the floor before the adoption of the draft decision? I do not see any request for the floor. Shall I consider that the Conference decides to adopt the draft decision which I have just read out from Revision 3 dated 26 March, which will be issued as an official document of the CD under the symbol CD/1501?

It was so decided.

Mr. ZAHRAN (Egypt) (translated from Arabic): Mr. President, I have pleasure in expressing to you my sincere congratulations on your assumption of the presidency of the Conference on Disarmament. Following the adoption of this decision, I would also like to express to you our appreciation of your wise direction of the work of this Conference. You are representing a brotherly country with which Egypt has maintained historical ties of friendship and cooperation. Despite the fact that Syria has only recently become a member of the Conference, your experience and skills have undoubtedly been reflected in the adoption today of the programme of work of the Conference on Disarmament. The sincere efforts exerted by your predecessor, Ambassador Hofer of Switzerland, during his presidency of the Conference, to draft a programme of work for the 1998 session undoubtedly constituted a sound basis for consensus-building on the programme of work of the Conference on Disarmament, which was adopted today in document CD/1501.

The delegation of Egypt has always sought the adoption of a comprehensive and balanced programme of work of the Conference on Disarmament which would show due regard for the priorities of the international community as expressed in the Final Document of the first special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament. This was reflected in an initiative concerning the programme of work for the 1997 session, an initiative which was adopted by the Group of 21 and tabled as document CD/1462 dated 5 June 1997. The delegation of Egypt has also always shown flexibility during the consultations on the draft programme of work submitted by the President with a view to moving the process forward and reaching consensus on the programme of work. However, it is unacceptable that the programme of work should reflect a retreat on the part of some countries from their obligations or disregard on the part of others for decisions or treaties already adopted.

Nuclear disarmament must remain at the top of the CD's priorities, as it was accorded the highest priority in the Final Document of SSOD-1 in 1978. Nuclear weapons are by far the most devastating of all weapons of mass destruction and, therefore, their elimination must remain the priority. The member States of the Conference on Disarmament are responsible before the international community for achieving this objective, the possession or use of these weapons being illegal pending their total elimination. Member States have to respond to the appeals of intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations concerning the dangers that nuclear weapons pose to international peace and security and to humanity at both the regional and the international levels by threatening to annihilate mankind and to violate the most important human right, namely the right to life, which is enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the fiftieth anniversary of which

(Mr. Zahran, Egypt)

is being celebrated in the nearby conference room No. 18 in the Palais des Nations. In this connection, I would like to quote the statement made by the Women for Peace Working Group in its letter addressed to the CD on 12 March 1998:

(continued in English)

> "While minimal progress has been registered in fulfilling all articles of the NPT, in particular article VI, we believe that it is in the Conference on Disarmament that steps must be taken to strive for nuclear disarmament. The global movement for the abolition of nuclear weapons is growing in momentum, finding friends in places that would have been unthinkable 10 years ago. Across the political spectrum citizens are calling for nuclear-weapon States to fulfil their treaty obligations."

(continued in Arabic)

It is well known that Egypt and a large number of States members of the Conference on Disarmament, both within and outside the framework of the Group of 21, have asked for the establishment of an ad hoc committee on nuclear disarmament under item 1 of the agenda as it is the agenda item that deserves the utmost priority. Several proposals have been tabled in this regard. However, in order to reach a consensus on the adoption of the programme of work for the 1998 session of the Conference, the delegation of Egypt reluctantly agreed to the appointment of a special coordinator to conduct consultations with the delegations of member States on the manner in which the Conference on Disarmament should deal with item 1 so that we can start the substantive work of the Conference and establish an ad hoc committee on nuclear disarmament which, in our view, should begin negotiations on a draft treaty to ban the production of fissile materials that could be used in the production of nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices, as Egypt proposed in the draft mandate of the ad hoc committee on nuclear disarmament contained in document CD/1453 dated 1 April 1997.

The proposal to request the President of the Conference on Disarmament to pursue consultations on item 1 raises several questions. Firstly, it does not introduce anything new because the President is empowered to conduct informal consultations on the items of the agenda in accordance with the rules of procedure of the Conference. Secondly, the fact that the President of the Conference holds this post for four weeks is not conducive to the continuity of consultations on an item to which the international community accords the highest priority. Furthermore, the manner in which the successive Presidents should pursue the consultations or follow up the outcome of consultations conducted by their predecessors is vague. All these questions give rise to considerable concern regarding the extent of the political will manifested by those who are opposed to the CD acting as a negotiating forum on nuclear disarmament. Therefore, the appointment of a special coordinator or a Friend of the Chair to conduct consultations on item 1 of the agenda, like the other items, is the best alternative as it will ensure a framework of continuity for the person who will take responsibility for conducting such consultations and presenting a report thereon at the end of his mandate without prejudicing the

(Mr. Zahran, Egypt)

positions of members or committing them a priori to the results of these consultations which will be reflected in his first report to be presented before the end of the second part of the 1998 session. At all events, the time-frame for the presentation of reports on this or other items by the special coordinators is something which has been reflected in the work programme and we congratulate you, Sir, as well as the Ambassador of Switzerland and all those who have contributed to the preparation of this programme in such a way as to ensure that it contains a time-frame for the presentation of reports to the Conference by the successive Presidents or by the coordinators.

I just wanted to put on record the position of Egypt regarding the manner in which the Conference should deal with item 1 of its agenda on the occasion of the adoption of the programme of work because we have reservations concerning the way in which the CD will deal with this item, although we are confident that the President of the Conference will accord top priority to this item. The delegation of Egypt supports the re-establishment of the Ad Hoc Committee on security assurances under item 4 of the agenda. We believe that the mandate of this Committee should enable it to start serious negotiations within the CD on a multilateral and legally binding instrument to provide non-nuclear-weapon States with comprehensive assurances as soon as possible in accordance with the decision on "Principles and objectives" adopted by the 1995 NPT Review and Extension Conference, as indicated in General Assembly resolution 52/36. Therefore, the proposal that the mandate of the Committee should focus on reaching agreement on effective international arrangements to guarantee the security of the non-nuclear-weapon States should be based on the international community's effective commitment to the decision on "Principles and objectives" and should refer to the wording contained in that decision, namely "an internationally legally binding instrument". In our view, General Assembly resolution 52/36 concerning an international convention or even a protocol that could be annexed to the NPT would fill the loophole left in this Treaty when it was adopted in 1968.

In this connection the delegation of Egypt has noted with appreciation the statement made by Ambassador Mark Moher and our colleague Sinclair of Canada before the plenary meeting on 19 March and today, 26 March, concerning this subject. Our belatedness in implementing the NPT, the decision on "Principles and objectives" and the resolution on the Middle East adopted at the 1995 NPT Review Conference does not bode well for the success of the Review Conference in the year 2000, the second preparatory session for which will begin in Geneva on 27 April 1998.

With regard to the statement that we heard from His Excellency Ambassador Grey of the United States on behalf of France and the United Kingdom concerning his interpretation of this phrase contained in paragraph 2 of the decision, we do not agree with this interpretation because this subject does not relate to regions; it relates to a universal treaty or to an international instrument. The delegation of Egypt is ready to go along with the wording proposed for the mandate of the special coordinators to be appointed for consultations on other agenda items despite the vagueness of that wording. The consultations that each coordinator will conduct will

(Mr. Zahran, Egypt)

provide a good opportunity to express our concerns and interests, namely, the prevention of an arms race in outer space, transparency in armaments and anti-personnel landmines. On this last issue we wish to emphasize that the special coordinator should take into consideration our positions concerning the responsibility of countries which planted landmines in the territories of other countries during their illegal foreign occupation to clear all those mines and to bear all the costs entailed thereby. In addition, national security concerns should be taken into consideration in the case of States which need to use landmines to defend their long borders passing through uninhabited areas.

In conclusion, Mr. President, these are some of the reservations and comments that the delegation of Egypt wishes to place on record on the occasion of the adoption of the programme of work of the 1998 session of the Conference. We deem it appropriate to place them on record so that you and future Presidents of the Conference and the special coordinators will take these considerations into account. I also hope that in your consultations to appoint a chairman for the Ad Hoc Committee on security assurances and special coordinators, you will take into account the need to strike a balance between the different geographical groups, and you will present the Conference next May with a list of candidates for these posts which will enjoy consensus.

The PRESIDENT (translated from Arabic): I thank the Ambassador of the Arab Republic of Egypt. I have on the list of speakers a number of requests. Since it is very close to 1 p.m. I hope you will speak as briefly as possible. I give the floor to the distinguished representative of the United Kingdom.

Mr. SOUTAR (United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland): Allow me first, Mr. President, to congratulate you on the assumption of the presidency of the Conference and to assure you of my delegation's full support and cooperation. I should also like to thank your predecessors, the Ambassadors of Switzerland and Sweden, for their efforts to launch the work of the Conference in this 1998 session. Thanks to your and their endeavours, we have been able this morning to adopt a decision which should allow us to get down to work on substantive issues. One further procedural step is required to enable us to begin that work, and I refer to the point just made by the distinguished Ambassador of Egypt: the appointment of individuals to assume the functions of Chairman of the Ad Hoc Committee on NSAs and the six Special Coordinators mentioned in the decision we have just taken. I wanted to inform the Conference that the Western Group have already given some thought to this issue, and we stand ready to engage in early consultations on the nomination of candidates for the various appointments.

Mr. GOOSEN (South Africa): At the start of the 1998 session of the Conference on Disarmament South Africa stated that all of us sitting in this room know what the real issues are which we are facing and which have a realistic potential for substantive work in the CD. We stated further that care should be taken that we do not respond to the expectations of the international community by agreeing to do "any work" so as to create a "perception of work". For South Africa, the CD is at a crossroads of

(Mr. Goosen, South Africa)

relevance and having learnt from its experience in 1997, the Conference should seek to grasp the challenge which faces it and honestly take up, debate and negotiate the real issues which are of concern.

Our delegation therefore wishes to note our concern that the decision on a programme of work which has just been adopted is not a cause for optimism. The decision reflects the lowest common denominator of consensus in the CD. It only addresses procedure through the establishment of mechanisms and the appointment of office holders to deal with issues in the Conference. It remains to be seen whether the opportunities which have been created are utilized to their full potential, and whether we will have honest debates on the real and substantive issues confronting us, seeking to find compromise solutions which address the genuine security concerns of the international community as a whole.

Notwithstanding these concerns, South Africa will participate in the implementation of this decision in an active and constructive spirit and in a continued endeavour to ensure the Conference's relevance into the future. This will be done on the basis of the call which Ambassador Selebi made to all delegations to look beyond the issues which divide them, for members not to adopt intractable positions, insisting on the inclusion of specific national and group positions, before any agreement can be reached, and to negate the re-emergence of maximalist positions which only succeed in retarding global disarmament. We believe that we have demonstrated our commitment to this approach in the negotiations for the decision adopted today and hope that the Conference as a whole will follow the same approach when we begin to address the substance of the decision taken.

Mrs. KUNADI (India): Mr. President, let me begin by congratulating you and your predecessors, the Ambassadors of Switzerland and Sweden, on their efforts to facilitate the work of the Conference on Disarmament.

I have requested the floor to set forward the views of my delegation on the decision the CD has just taken. We feel that while we can go along to enable the CD to get down to work, the decision does not reflect the priorities of my delegation. As was stated in my plenary statement of 12 February, India attaches the highest priority to the establishment of an ad hoc committee on nuclear disarmament. This remains an unfulfilled task of this Conference and should receive the attention and focus that the vast majority of delegations expect. We will put forward our views during the forthcoming consultations on this item.

Mr. KHORRAM (Islamic Republic of Iran): Mr. President, I should like to congratulate you on your assumption of the presidency of the Conference and the tireless efforts you have made to overcome the deadlock in adopting the programme of work of the CD. Moreover, I should like to express my gratitude to your predecessors, Ambassador Norberg and Ambassador Hofer, who played a significant role in preparing for the successful conclusion of our deliberations on this subject.

(Mr. Khorram, Islamic Republic of Iran)

Despite our difficulties in accepting some of the provisions of the presidential declaration, we have decided to join the consensus in order to facilitate the normal functioning of the Conference and to ensure its contribution to disarmament. However, we have joined the consensus on the following understanding. Firstly, the declaration and the decision contained therein do not represent our national position, nor is it an indication of our priority; second, consultations of the President on agenda item 1, entitled "Cessation of the nuclear arms race and nuclear disarmament", and their consequent results have the same status and effect as those conducted by the Special Coordinators on other agenda items; third, negotiations of the Ad Hoc Committee under agenda item 4 on NSAs should be seriously and mainly directed at reaching effective and legally binding international instruments to assure non-nuclear-weapon States against the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons; fourth, the appointment of a special coordinator on agenda item 3, PAROS, should be seen as the first step towards the re-establishment of its ad hoc committee; and fifth, the reference to developments outside the Conference on anti-personnel landmines in paragraph 4 does not, and should not, prejudge the outcome of consultations to be conducted by the Special Coordinator under agenda item 6.

Mr. HAYASHI (Japan): As this is the first time for me to take the floor since the commencement of your presidency, allow me to congratulate you, Mr. President, on your assumption of the high post of President of the Conference on Disarmament at this important juncture. I assure you of our delegation's full support and cooperation.

On behalf of the delegation of Japan, I would like to state that I am pleased to see that agreement has been finally reached today on the programme of work of the Conference on Disarmament this year. In this regard, I would like, Mr. President, to express my appreciation and gratitude for your attempts to come up with the proposal which, while based upon the result of the discussions of 13 March, tried to overcome the remaining difficulties. Your initiative in coordinating the various points of view and incorporating them in the agreement in a manner that led to its successful adoption is truly laudable.

The outcome of today would not have been possible without the efforts made by the previous Presidents. Our first President of this year, Ambassador Lars Norberg, after having successfully realized the adoption of the agenda on the first day of the Conference of this year, coordinated the views of the delegations towards a framework within which an agreement might be possible for the CD to start working. The next President, Ambassador Erwin Hofer, after various forms of consultations which he conducted energetically, presented a comprehensive proposal and we were very near to an agreement on 13 March. I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude for these untiring and dedicated endeavours of the former Presidents and current President. At the same time, I wish to commend every delegation for their compromise and cooperation that has made this agreement possible.

For our part, it is true that Japan is not entirely satisfied with today's agreement. Japan has priority items, such as the fissile missile

(Mr. Hayashi, Japan)

cut-off treaty, and would have preferred to have it adequately reflected in the decision. It should be noted, however, that Japan, aware of the necessity of beginning work in the CD as soon as possible, has gone along with the consensus of the CD. It is my hope that this same spirit will prevail in the future when we engage in substantive discussions on various agenda items.

I said earlier that I am pleased with the agreement. But at the same time we should bear in mind that today's agreement represents only the beginning, in other words, we are now simply at the starting line. The real test is what the CD will do. It is Japan's hope that from the outset of the second session, beginning in May, the Conference on Disarmament will commence its substantive work. Specifically, I would like to urge those who are appointed as special coordinators to start seeking the respective views of delegations immediately and coordinating the various outlooks in order to formulate solutions on how best the CD can deal with each issue. Ideally, Japan hopes to see ad hoc committees established in the least possible time and subsequently engage in real negotiations. The difficulties that lie ahead will be even greater than those in the past. More efforts and more flexibility will be required.

Mr. AKRAM (Pakistan): Mr. President, I would like to add my voice to those who have congratulated you on having achieved a decision by the Conference on Disarmament to start, at least partially, its substantive work. This is an important crossroads in the history of this body, and although the outcome is modest, it nevertheless represents the start of what we believe will be a long but productive journey towards the objectives to which the Conference is dedicated. We hope that appropriate credit will accrue to the efforts made by your predecessors, Ambassador Lars Norberg of Sweden, as well as and in particular, Ambassador Hofer of Switzerland, who made significant contributions to the evolution of this consensus.

Having said that, and also expressing the hope that the individuals concerned will be appointed as soon as possible, I would like to add that the decision that has been taken does not reflect the priorities and national security concerns of my country fully. We have continued to attach importance and priority to initiating negotiations on nuclear disarmament within this Conference, and we remain extremely concerned that a few States, a handful of States, have continued to oppose the start of multilateral negotiations on nuclear disarmament. We hope that the consultations which the presidency will undertake in accordance with this decision will lead to agreement for the establishment of a negotiating mechanism for nuclear disarmament in the very near future. We welcome the decision to re-establish the Ad Hoc Committee on negative security assurances. We have, since 1968, sought conclusion of a legally binding international instrument which will effectively assure non-nuclear-weapon States against the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons. We do not believe that such guarantees have been given and, indeed, we believe that some recent developments have increased the threat of use of nuclear weapons against non-nuclear-weapon States. We are pleased with the other decisions to appoint special coordinators for outer space, anti-personnel landmines, as well as transparency in armaments. Finally, I would like to add that we believe that this decision does not exclude any delegation from

(Mr. Akram, Pakistan)

submitting new proposals with regard to issues and items that are not covered under this decision, and my delegation reserves the right to come back with specific suggestions on certain issues which were raised by the Foreign Minister of Pakistan in his statement last week.

Mr. LI (China) (translated from Chinese): The Chinese delegation just now participated in the decision on the 1998 work programme of the Conference on Disarmament. In the first place my delegation warmly congratulates you on the assumption of the presidency of this Conference and assures you of our full support and cooperation.

The decision on the work programme of the CD for 1998 is the outcome of repeated consultations over 10 weeks among all the parties concerned, and takes into consideration as far as possible the positions and concerns of all parties. It is the broadest agreement that can be reached at the moment. Since this is the product of a compromise, with flexibility being displayed by all concerned, it must necessarily be partly satisfactory and partly not to each of them. As far as the Chinese delegation is concerned, there are some things in the decision that we are not satisfied with, but we wish to be as constructive and flexible as possible. My delegation has taken note of the clarification in paragraph 9 of the decision, namely: "This decision is also taken without prejudice to the rights of members of the Conference

(continued in English)

to move forward with positions and proposals already made or to be put forward in the future",

(continued in Chinese)

or to any delegation's position in that connection, or to future developments on the decisions set forth in paragraphs 1, 3, 4 and 5.

Finally, my delegation would like to express its appreciation for the efforts of the three Presidents of the CD this session - you yourself, Sir, your predecessor, Ambassador Norberg of Sweden, and Ambassador Hofer of Switzerland - and for the earnestness and flexibility displaced by all parties. We hope this spirit can be maintained in the future work of the Conference on Disarmament.

Mr. SEIBERT (Germany): Mr. President, I apologize for taking the floor at this late hour. I should like, since this is the first time I have taken the floor during your presidency, to congratulate you on the assumption of your office and assure you of our fullest support, and at the same time congratulate you on today's achievement and for your tireless effort and that of your predecessors, Ambassadors Hofer and Norberg.

We have decided today on a modest step which, albeit for the different reasons cited by previous speakers, does not fully reflect the priorities of my delegation. But even for this modest step to become fully operational, we need of course to decide on the appointment of the Chairman of the Ad Hoc

(Mr. Seibert, Germany)

Committee and the Special Coordinators, and my delegation would very much prefer if we could still, during this session, decide on the nomination of these individuals so that they can use the recess until the next part of the session to prepare for their task and we could move forward on exploring what this Conference might do during this year on substance. Otherwise, we would lose too much time, and we might not have an opportunity to discuss substance at all. So this is just to remind you of our desire to move forward, not only on procedure, but also to move forward to discussing substance in this Conference.

The PRESIDENT (translated from Arabic): I thank the distinguished Ambassador of Germany for his statement. Allow me now to make a statement in my national capacity as representative of my country, the Syrian Arab Republic. We have accepted this paper, which was supported by consensus, precisely in order to be able to reach this consensus and avoid opposing it. However, the draft decisions in the paper do not respond to our national concerns, especially on nuclear disarmament, anti-personnel landmines and the question of transparency. This is the national position that I had already explained in the statement I made before the Conference. I trust that these reservations will be reflected in the records of this meeting.

I have now terminated my statement as representative of the Syrian Arab Republic and I would like to take this opportunity to express my sincere gratitude to the distinguished members of the Conference. In particular, I would like to thank my predecessors Ambassadors Norberg and Hofer, who provided us with the infrastructure for the paper that we have adopted today. I thank them and congratulate all of you on the spirit that prevailed - the spirit of flexibility and consensus which enabled us to adopt these decisions which will pave the way for us to make progress on the other items on our agenda.

Please allow me now to move on to the question of the coordinators, now that we have agreed on the programme of work. We have before us the question of the appointment of a chairman for the Ad Hoc Committee on negative security assurances and six coordinators for the decisions in the paper that we have adopted. I believe that a number of delegations wish to submit candidates to undertake these functions. I shall remain in contact with the coordinators of the various groups during the interval between the first and second parts of the session in order to ascertain the wishes of the various groups and identify the persons so that, when we resume the second part of our session, we will have before us a complete picture as far as the coordinators are concerned and as far as the Chairman of the Ad Hoc Committee on negative security assurances is concerned. This is my idea at the moment. I would welcome your advice and am ready to listen to any comments or proposals from you that would speed up this process.

Ms. CRITTENBERGER (United States of America): Mr. President, we have listened closely to your suggestions on how we proceed now, and we do feel that, having spent 10 weeks to reach this decision, perhaps we should try to move things a bit more quickly now, and that perhaps it might be possible, through intensive consultations over the next 24 hours, to already reach some

(Ms. Crittenberger, United States)

understandings about who the Chairman for the NSA Ad Hoc Committee might be and who the Special Coordinators might be. In that way, those individuals could take advantage of the interim period, which I believe will be five or six weeks long, to begin to prepare for their tasks at the second part of our session.

The PRESIDENT (translated from Arabic): I thank the distinguished representative of the United States of America. I am at your disposal, distinguished delegates, and I am willing to respond to your wishes if you believe that we could be ready, within 24 hours, to identify the Chairman of the Ad Hoc Committee and the coordinators. However, at this stage, I do not believe that the situation is absolutely clear. Therefore, I have suggested that I should undertake consultations, during the coming period, with the coordinators or through the coordinators in order to ascertain the wishes of the members concerning these posts.

The representative of France, you have the floor Sir.

Mr. RIVASSEAU (France) (translated from French): Mr. President, allow me to convey congratulations to you on behalf of the French delegation, both on taking the Chair and for the results that you have enabled this Conference to achieve. You have asked for practical suggestions and it seems to me that, on the basis of past experience, particularly last year, which on this specific point was not so negative, we could perhaps try and gradually pinpoint the situation - a task you rightly consider necessary - perhaps by having a short informal consultation this afternoon that would make it possible to have a preliminary idea of the various "posts" which might go to each group, so that each group could focus its deliberations more directly on the actual posts to be filled, and perhaps it might be useful to keep open the possibility, on the basis of the results of this afternoon's informal consultations, of having a brief plenary meeting, probably tomorrow, in the event that decisions could be adopted. If longer consultations are called for, then we would be quite ready to support the approach you have suggested.

Mr. BOUCHAARA (Morocco) (translated from French): It is very late, so I shall be very brief. I think that my delegation would opt for your first proposal. In view of the fact that a number of Ambassadors are very involved in the Commission on Human Rights, I think it would be wiser if we all stay in touch with the Chair, to hold consultations both bilaterally and in the groups so as to be able to settle this matter. But I do not think it should be pushed through hastily in 24 hours - I do not think that would be very productive. We are all anxious to get down to work and we are pleased at what has happened today, but I think we must give ourselves enough time so as to be able to have the right candidates in the right posts.

The PRESIDENT (translated from Arabic): I thank the representative of the Kingdom of Morocco. That is my own view. We have to appoint six coordinators and the chairman of an ad hoc committee, i.e. seven persons. Since we have three or four groups, it is not a simple matter at this stage, and therefore the President will remain in contact with the coordinators in

(The President)

order to ascertain the wishes of the members of the groups on this question. We hope that the picture will be clear when we resume our work. On this basis, therefore, I wish to conclude this formal plenary meeting. The representative of the United States of America, you have the floor.

Ms. CRITTENBERGER (United States of America): I realize the hour is late and it is well into the lunchtime period, but I do think that we can hardly be accused in the CD of moving too fast. It took us ten weeks to get to where we are today, so I would hope that at least some of us have been doing some thinking about what jobs could be filled. I realize perhaps more time might be needed and that consultations might be needed and perhaps this afternoon groups could consult and you, Mr. President, might hold a consultation tomorrow morning, just to see where things stand, and if things stood such that we could take a decision, there is always the possibility of having a plenary tomorrow afternoon.

Mr. ZAHRAN (Egypt) (translated from Arabic): In actual fact, I do not imagine that the groups are going to meet and find candidates and that we are going to agree on the whole picture concerning not only the candidates of each group but also the candidates of the other groups. I do not believe that a decision could be reached on that. Although I would very much like that to happen, as you know it is now 1.30 in the afternoon and we are already late. If, as the President of the Conference, you find through your consultations with the coordinators that the time is right, then you could call for a plenary. However, we cannot commit ourselves as of now to hold a plenary tomorrow afternoon and then fail to agree on anything. If you find that there is a clear possibility of consensus on a list of personalities who could fill the posts of Chairman of the Ad Hoc Committee and the coordinators, in such a case, we would be willing to be convened urgently. However, I do not think that it would be wise to meet but fail to reach agreement. It would not be logical to waste our time in this way. Therefore, during your informal consultations with the coordinators, if you find that the picture is clear, you could convene a meeting and we would be perfectly willing to attend.

The PRESIDENT (translated from Arabic): I thank the distinguished Ambassador of the Arab Republic of Egypt. At the outset, I explained my impression to the members of the Conference. I said that I did not believe that there was a consensus right now on the persons to fill the posts of special coordinators and the post of Chairman of the Ad Hoc Committee on NSAs and, therefore, during the interval between the two parts of the session, I would continue consultations through the coordinators in order to ascertain the wishes of the members and the groups so that we can agree on this matter and come to the resumed session with a clear picture of the persons and the groups that are going to undertake these functions. That is my view, which I am proposing to the members of the Conference.

Therefore, on the basis of this understanding, I declare this plenary meeting concluded. The next plenary meeting will be held on Thursday, 14 May 1998, at 10 a.m.

The meeting rose at 1.30 p.m.